

**CHINESE MILITARY SCENARIOS AGAINST TAIWAN:  
PREMISES, OPTIONS, IMPLICATIONS**

by

Lawrence E. Grinter

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# **Chinese Military Scenarios Against Taiwan: Premises, Options, Implications**

Lawrence E. Grinter

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## **Chinese Military Scenarios Against Taiwan: Premises, Options, Implications**

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When Beijing fell to Mao Zedong's Communist forces in October 1949, major elements of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) armies had already slipped across the Taiwan Strait to the island of Formosa from where the KMT government continued to claim jurisdiction over the mainland.

Thus, while the fighting ended in China's civil war, the political conflict continued, as it does today. Although the Taipei government long ago dropped its claim to the mainland, Beijing continues to claim sovereignty over Taiwan, and threatens Taipei with war if it declares "independence."

In the half century since Mao's triumph, the United States has sought to preclude a new war between China's communists on the mainland and the nationalists on Taiwan. Particularly since normalizing relations with Beijing in January 1979, Washington has tried to steer a middle course, seeking to avoid too close an identification with the Republic of China (ROC) and too hostile a stance toward the People's Republic of China (PRC). The ultimate U.S. goal is to deter both an attack by China and a declaration of independence by Taiwan, while encouraging a peaceful resolution. This delicate, at times, contradictory, policy has been labeled "strategic ambiguity."

When China intervened in the Korean War, the U.S. interposed elements of the 7th Fleet into the Taiwan Strait. During the Second Indochina War, as the U.S. bombed North Vietnam, China relocated key elements of its industry farther inland. When Beijing normalized relations with Washington in early 1979, the U.S. Congress moved to continue the military assistance relationship with Taipei through the Taiwan Relations Act, which continues to govern U.S.-Taiwan relations. And during more recent events and crises in Sino-U.S. relations, like the June 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the 1995-96 PRC missile firings, or the April 2001 EP-3E incident, the United States, China and Taiwan have all interacted regarding Strait security.

But what if, in Beijing's view, China's current deterrence/enticement policies toward Taiwan begin to falter, or worse, break down completely? What are the likely options Beijing might choose to regain control of the

situation? And what would be the implications of various Chinese attack options on Taiwan and on the U.S.? This paper explores those questions.

It is likely that China's leaders principal goal toward Taiwan is to politically absorb the island and its population under peaceful circumstances if that is possible. Second, and related to that goal, PRC leaders wish to deter what Beijing considers to be any rash independence moves by the Taipei government, and to dissuade any military intervention by the United States. Third, should China's deterrent/enticement policy toward Taiwan falter, the mainland leadership may choose to militarily intervene, creating new circumstances favorable to Beijing. Fourth, should Beijing's leaders conclude China must go to war over Taiwan, they will aim to fight, win, and take the island by force.

This thinking assumes that if China's stick and carrot deterrent/enticement policy falters, Beijing's leaders would employ a gradual escalation policy of coercion and pressure, signaling their seriousness and measuring responses before initiating war against Taiwan. However, others have argued that one future day the Chinese might forego gradual escalation, if they were determined to press ahead with reunification, and opt for an overwhelming surprise attack on Taiwan, attempting to present the world with a *fait accompli*.

The author believes this last option is an unlikely choice, in part because U.S. intelligence would very likely pick up Beijing's military preparations for an attack and Washington would move, in concert with Taiwan, to counter it. The Chinese leaders likely would be deterred from such an unprovoked or surprise attack on Taiwan that would wreck China's relations with much of the world. Nevertheless, the preemptive use of force by China cannot be totally ruled out. Chinese leaders understand surprise and deception, and have employed them before against the United States and others.

### **Threats, Deterrence, and Enticements: Beijing's Multi-Pronged Strategy Toward Taipei**

Under President Jiang Zemin, a nationalistic China has increased pressure on Taiwan to unite with the mainland under Beijing's "one China" concept. The People's Republic of China continues to use a variety of enticements, ploys, and threats toward the Republic of China.

Success for Beijing in deterring a Taiwan declaration of independence, or U.S. military intervention, or possibly a ROC move toward nuclear weapons, depends on the PRC convincing Taipei's leaders that it will attack if they take one or more of these steps and convincing Washington that it is not worth the costs – political, economic, or in risks to U.S. naval and air assets – to intervene.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, Chinese authorities understand, even as they deny it, that raising pressure on Taiwan produces reactions in the ROC and in the United States that jeopardize other PRC policy goals. Chinese pressure has hardened the positions of Taiwanese independence advocates who press on President Chen Shui-bian's government. Chinese pressure tactics also harden views in the U.S. Congress and the conservative US media that, in turn, push the Bush administration to adopt tougher U.S. policies toward China.

To give China's deterrent posture credibility, Beijing's leaders use a spectrum of measures – political, economic, and military – designed to convince both Taipei and Washington that the PRC is serious. Political aspects of deterrence involve the constant drumbeat of propaganda about Taiwan as the “sovereign territory of the PRC,” as “an internal matter,” and that “foreign forces must not intervene.”

Simultaneously, Beijing also proposes a variety of “reasonable” and “liberal” formulas for “re-unifying the motherland” under “one China.”<sup>2</sup> Chinese diplomats repeatedly caution Washington that American arms sales to Taiwan have “serious implications” for Sino-U.S. relations.<sup>3</sup>

Economically, the PRC relies on the anxieties of investors and insurers whenever there is tension around the Taiwan Strait. Indeed, the missile threats of 1995 and 1996 saw a near collapse of the Taiwan stock market and temporary disinvestment of billions of dollars.<sup>4</sup> However, China also encourages the transfer of Taiwanese manufacturing assets to the mainland, an accelerating phenomenon that some worry will produce a “hollowing out” of Taiwan industry, as is happening in the case of Hong Kong.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the growing economic engagement between China and Taiwan carries higher risks for Taipei than for Beijing. Should war occur, most of Taiwan's investments on the mainland presumably would go down the drain.

The military aspects of China's Taiwan policy concentrate on intimidating Taipei through PRC weapons acquisitions, exercises, crossing provocation thresholds, and signaling PRC warfighting capabilities. As stated in the Pentagon's 1999 report to Congress on the Taiwan situation,

the Chinese military buildup, including the short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) deployments opposite Taiwan, is projected to be over 600 by 2005, and will give the PRC the ability to mount a serious attack and to degrade Taiwan's key military facilities and economic infrastructure. Also by 2005, the PRC is expected to gain air superiority over Taiwan, if the United States is left out of the equation.<sup>6</sup>

At present, Taiwan holds the technological edge in 4th generation jet aircraft. Its 150 F-16s and 58 Mirage 2000-5s, if engaged in an air battle, can beat the PRC's current 70 Su-27s and 20 Su-30s. But China's Air Force has over 3,000 other fighter aircraft backing up those Su-27s, and has another 130 Su-27s and 40 Su-30s on order.<sup>7</sup> Many of China's older aircraft are obsolete, but the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) combat strategy could push swarms of expendable fighters into the air battle, drawing off the Republic of China Air Force's (ROCAF's) best assets, before sending in the Su-27s and Su-30s to achieve air supremacy, a necessary first step to a forced reunification of Taiwan with the mainland regime.<sup>8</sup>

At sea, China's navy is moving from an obsolescent "brown water" navy to a force reaching for sea control out to the "second island chain" (the Japanese Philippine-Singapore axis), which also includes Taiwan.

Notable recent PRC acquisitions include Russian Kilo-class submarines and Sovremenny destroyers. Behind these new platforms are 63 other People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) tactical submarines compared to Taiwan's four. The PRC also possesses 60 other principal surface combatants compared to Taiwan's 32.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, at present in a straightforward naval battle, without U.S. military intervention, China's navy likely would prevail against Taiwan's naval forces, assuming it also can neutralize Taiwan's air power.

Defensive planning by Taiwan authorities requires more than simply matching or trumping China's growing air and naval capabilities. Thinking through strategies to counter probable PRC coercion and attack options is necessary. It can be assumed that deception and denial will characterize both sides' strategies. After all, both governments are steeped in the principles of Sun Tzu and other Asian strategists that emphasize such deception practices.

Also of interest is President Chen's announced defense concept of "decisive campaign beyond boundary." Its details demonstrate Taiwanese thinking about preempting a looming Chinese attack, going after PRC staging areas early in a crisis, seizing the initiative, and launching spoiling

attacks by targeting a variety of PRC military bases and missile launch sites. There is also some support within the Taiwan government for acquisition of an offensive counter-force capability, principally SRBMs and air assets capable of hitting Chinese missile launch sites, ports, etc. Chen's concept and these other views have prompted wide-ranging debate in Taiwan.<sup>10</sup>

To date, Beijing's policies, Taiwan's reactions, and American "strategic ambiguity" have kept the peace in the Strait area. There has been no formal Taiwanese declaration of independence, no explicit tie between Taiwan and Washington, and no known ROC nuclear weapons.

Moreover, President Chen Shui-bian's May 2000 inauguration remarks should have eased Beijing's concern about the Chen administration's "independence" option. As Chen commented, so long as "the CCP regime has no intention to use military force against Taiwan, I pledge that during my term in office I will not declare independence, I will not change the national title, I will not push for the inclusion of the so-called 'state-to-state' description in the Constitution, and I will not promote a referendum to change the status quo in regards to the question of independence or unification."<sup>11</sup>

Nothing subsequent to these remarks, including the DPP's December 2001 enlargement of its position in the ROC legislature, and Chen's periodic calls on Beijing to negotiate, should have jeopardized the Beijing leaders' assumptions, assuming Chinese rationality, of an unprovocative ROC government.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Beijing's deterrent policy, so far, is working.

However, should things change, Beijing's leaders would be faced with the option of doing nothing, and probably suffering a severe loss of face, or of escalating pressure on Taiwan to reverse the situation. This author believes that the Chinese will fight rather than lose face. Others argue that, irrespective of Taiwan's actions, Beijing could seek to lull Taipei and Washington into a false sense of security, then mount a massive surprise attack on the Republic of China.<sup>13</sup> Whatever Beijing's secret timetable or lack of one, and whatever premises China's leaders use to evaluate Taiwan, it is wise to assume that the decision-makers and planners in Beijing are weighing the risks and outcomes of various conflict scenarios. Here are the most frequently discussed options, which are not mutually exclusive.

## **Destabilization Short of War**

Should Taiwan's regime still persist in overtly pursuing a "declaration of independence" from the mainland, despite the PRC's growing military threats, Beijing's leaders could seek to coerce Taiwan's government through a multifaceted destabilization campaign. Indeed, Beijing has been actively testing various destabilizing measures against Taiwan for years.<sup>14</sup> Objectionable moves by Taipei, or simple worry in Beijing that Taiwan was slipping out of its grasp, could trigger destabilization moves. Such a PRC campaign could be conducted in ways to minimize outside (U.S.) intervention, while producing serious trauma in Taiwan. Publicly, Beijing's actions could be conveyed as "self-defense" or "assistance to Taiwanese patriots," or "restoring peace." Simultaneously Beijing would emphasize "conciliation" offers seeking to work with or fashion "patriotic elements," or possibly to provide an alternative government on the island.

The varieties and combinations of destabilizing measures Beijing could employ against Taiwan might include measures such as:

- harassment of commercial shipping and/or air traffic;
- information/disinformation warfare attacks;
- special operations against critical infrastructure nodes or facilities;
- manipulation of Taiwan stock markets or computer attacks on banks;
- calls for liberation from Taiwanese "compatriots;"
- harassment by Su-27s and F-8s over the Taiwan Strait;
- computer attacks on key communications, transportation hubs, and air and sea traffic controls...an "electronic Pearl Harbor;"
- ballistic missile tests near Taiwan;
- seizure of offshore islands.<sup>15</sup>

Beijing's destabilization measures likely would aim at reversing threatening trends, creating internal chaos in Taiwan, or might even have the purpose of instigating a major breakdown in the ROC's ability to govern effectively, trends that Beijing could exploit with offers to

Taiwanese “patriots” inviting them to join a “greater China.” The PRC might, for example, offer more privileges and guarantees than those given Hong Kong or Macao when those two territories were being brought under PRC control. Authorities in Taipei anticipate these tactics, knowing they could be orchestrated in a limited fashion, or as precursors to a full-scale Chinese attack on Taiwan.

## **Blockade**

Should it come to armed conflict with Taiwan, a middle course for China would be to initiate an escalating naval blockade, using units from the East China Sea Fleet to starve Taiwan, by denying it re-supply and support from the outside. Taiwan is heavily dependent on seaborne cargo imports.<sup>16</sup> Beijing probably would not call its naval action a “blockade” since, in international law, the term is defined as an act of war. Instead, under the guise of naval and air “exercises,” which incidentally have been enlarging,<sup>17</sup> possibly accompanied by missile “tests,” China could warn and convince merchant ships and commercial aircraft to vacate the Taiwan Strait area. Fast PRC patrol boats could be positioned off Keelung and Kaohsiung harbors, and PLAN submarines could be flooded into the Strait, while overhead, Su-27s and F-8s could provide an intimidating presence by buzzing Taiwan’s western coast and sea commerce below.

A Chinese blockade of Taiwan’s western ports is more feasible than on the eastern coast, since extending a blockade around to Taiwan’s eastern shores in the present or near future would overextend PLAN/PLAAF capabilities and more easily expose them to US naval and air intervention. Perhaps Beijing’s spokesman would characterize such a blockade as protecting Chinese “shipping” or “nationals,” seeking to buy time and trying to force Taiwan to lose its nerve, while attempting to influence Washington to keep U.S. naval/air reactions at low levels. Seeking to limit U.S. or other outside interference, authorities in Beijing might declare they were explicitly limiting offensive operations against Taiwan, or might promise to avoid offensive operations against U.S. naval or air forces if they stay out of the fray.

However, if Beijing moved to blockade Taiwan’s western side, the PRC has at its command more than 60 diesel submarines, many of which could be inserted into the Strait. Such a force would seriously complicate

Taiwanese seaborne transport and re-supply. Given the acoustic complexity of the Strait, submarine signature control technology would not be required.

PLAN officers have considered conducting surprise “guerrilla” attacks at sea, using “irregular” forces such as junk ships, as well as elements of China’s civilian merchant fleet. PRC planners have looked at using tactics such as towing acoustic decoys, or seeding decoys, transponder buoys or radar reflectors to confuse rival commanders and their forces. PRC plans also have considered trying to snare enemy submarines in explodable heavy nets<sup>18</sup> – all this could be integral to a “stealth” blockade scenario aimed at denying reinforcement to Taiwan.

Should the Chinese navy opt for a more explicit, high profile naval/air blockade of Taiwan, the PLAN would rely on recent high technology platforms like its current inventory of four Russian Kilo-class submarines soon to be twelve, and surface combat vessels like its Luhu-class guided missile destroyers with their foreign designed diesel-gas turbines, weapons suites, torpedoes, and fire control systems, and the Russian Sovremenny destroyers with their SS-N-22 Sunburn anti-ship missiles.<sup>19</sup>

At present China’s navy does not yet have enough Kilos and Sovremennys to win against the U.S. Navy in an extended conventional fight, but more Kilos and Sovremennys are on order, and the 7,300-ton Sovremenny is a serious offensive firepower platform. In addition to its SS-N-22 Sunburn missiles, it has four five-inch guns, wake homing torpedoes, and batteries of anti-aircraft missiles and guns.

“Its enough,” comments RADM Eric McVadon (USN-Retired), “to make the U.S. 7th Fleet think twice.”<sup>20</sup> Or the Chinese might try to preempt the United States by getting in the first blow. As Bernard Cole writes: “Chinese naval strategists appear to understand the vast gulf in capabilities between the PLAN and the U.S. Navy. As a result, PLAN planners should be expected to try to seize the initiative in an operational situation where the United States might be a participant.”<sup>21</sup>

The United States could respond with a variety of actions against a PRC blockade of Taiwan to include hitting PLAN and PLAAF facilities supporting the blockade. But China would have the advantage of fighting close to its bases until, and if, repeated U.S. carrier air strikes took their toll.<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that any combat between two nuclear powers such as the United States and PRC would be exceedingly dangerous and this fact should inhibit the actions of both sides.



Taiwan's present counter to the PRC's naval capabilities is a slow naval buildup, but Taipei currently still has only four functioning submarines, all of them of WWII vintage. In its April 2001 decision, the Bush Administration offered Taiwan new diesel electric submarines, P-3 Orion anti-submarine aircraft, and Kidd-class destroyers, but not equipped with the Aegis anti-missile system. The sale has not yet occurred.<sup>23</sup> Taiwan's difficulty in absorbing Aegis technology also may have been a factor in the prolonged discussions between Taipei and Washington.<sup>24</sup>

### **Seaborne Invasion with Air Support**

Triggered by a complete breakdown in China's deterrent policy, Beijing could order an invasion of Taiwan. The Politburo nevertheless still might hope to avoid direct conflict with Washington stating that China would not hit American assets unless the U.S. directly threatened PLA Navy and PLA Air Force operations. Chinese air superiority would have to precede any invasion so that PLA Navy barges and troop carriers, as well as airborne troops, had a chance. Recall that successful U.S. invasions of Okinawa, Normandy and Inchon all had U.S. air superiority. Nevertheless, the recent Pentagon report warns that "China has a large fleet of about 600 military and civilian landing craft which could be used for ship-to-shore operations."<sup>25</sup> However, the number of relevant Chinese airborne troops is estimated at only approximately 15,000.<sup>26</sup> Thus, a serious air battle might be expected between the PLAAF and the ROCAF before the PRC invaded.

Presently a PRC seaborne and air supported invasion of Taiwan is judged to be impractical. The PRC does not yet have enough troop carriers, or sustainability, for a combined naval-land-air operation. In spring 1999, the DOD estimated that the PLA Navy had the sealift capacity to carry only one infantry division.<sup>27</sup> Even if China acquired new invasion capabilities, and sought to draft the merchant fleet, the PLAN faces serious obstacles in trying to gain control of action around the Taiwan Strait.

In Bernard Cole's assessment PLA Navy modernization has been "haphazard" and "incoherent" given the constraints on the navy's budget, poor industrial quality, and leadership.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Taiwan has natural barriers against a seaborne invasion including rocky coasts and

inhospitable shore areas opposite the mainland. The west coast of Taiwan, for example, has mud flats extending two to five miles out to sea, huge cliffs, and tides that fluctuate to average variations of 15 feet per day, as well as two monsoon seasons.

ROC-occupied islands adjacent to the mainland China coast also act as an early warning system. Add in the ROC's robust layered shore-based coastal defenses, and the effect is to make an amphibious invasion of Taiwan very difficult in the near term, even as China acquires more transport craft.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the Chinese navy has underway a purchase of eight more Russian kilo-class diesel-electric submarines which are quiet boats with advanced sonar equipment, in addition to its 63 older diesel powered submarines. And the PLA Navy is adding new principal surface combatants to its current 60, to include Russian-guided missile destroyers and guided missile frigates. China is also expanding its rapid reaction units, and establishing offshore satellite stations.

The net effect regarding Taiwan, writes Bernard Cole, is that, "Beijing is building a navy capable of decisively influencing the operational aspects of the Taiwan and South China Sea situations should diplomacy and the other instruments of statecraft fail."<sup>30</sup>

## **Missile Attack**

If China's policy of deterrence and enticement were to fail, the starkest option for Beijing, presumably in concert with an invasion of Taiwan, would be a ballistic missile attack, launched from Fujian and Jiangxi provinces, against Taiwan's principal land targets, air bases, and naval facilities. Given these missiles' short flight time, about seven to eight minutes, and Beijing's efforts to conceal the missiles' firing positions,<sup>31</sup> Taiwan could not counter them.

China's SRBM buildup in the south has been steady and ominous; the PRC now has approximately 350 M-9 and M-11 missiles in the south, and evidently are adding 50 to 70 per year.<sup>32</sup> Any Chinese missile attacks against Taiwan would represent the most extreme action, an all out war—whether motivated by deliberation or desperation in the Politburo. A missile attack could wreak havoc on the island. Infrastructure, logistics, and community centers likely would be turned to rubble, given the

currently poor targeting precision of the SRBMs. A missile attack also would produce huge foreign economic disinvestment in China and in Taiwan, setting back the PRC's foreign relations and reputation for years.

Taiwan likely would strike back with everything it had, doing what damage it could to southern and eastern China. If such a war took place Beijing conceivably would spare most key Taiwan population centers, possibly because of fear of US retaliation against Chinese cities. However, Taiwan, in danger of losing its national identity, might not show such restraint, and here we can only speculate about what weapons, including weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Taipei authorities have and might employ.

There is no publicly available information to indicate that Taiwan has successfully built any nuclear weapons or bomb cores. However diversion of nuclear materials in Taiwan evidently occurred in the mid-1970s and again in 1987. As Michael Klare wrote in 1993: "U.S. officials discovered that Taipei had begun construction of a small plutonium extraction facility and was planning to reprocess spent fuel from a 40-megawatt research reactor at Lung Tan. Pressure was again applied by Washington, and Taipei agreed for a second time to abandon its nuclear weapons research."<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless there are periodic unsubstantiated reports that the ROC continues to conduct military nuclear research. The PRC, by comparison, is believed to have at least 450 operational nuclear weapons and the flexibility to fit them into missiles, aircraft, ships, and artillery pieces.<sup>34</sup> It is likely that Taiwan has the capability for chemical and biological warfare, as it is believed does the PRC.<sup>35</sup>

## **Probabilities and Implications**

So what is the most likely military strategy that Beijing would employ against Taiwan if its policy of deterrence and enticement fails toward the ROC? It always has the option of a surprise attack, and perhaps the enlarging Chinese naval and air exercises opposite Taiwan using surface ships, submarines, aircraft and amphibious troops, are laying the basis for an eventual Chinese "naval/air bridge" across the Strait. But to pull it off at this time, China's capabilities are very limited. More likely, if China chose conflict options, it would conduct a three-phased campaign, holding off the second and third phases until PRC leaders could

determine if their coercive objectives against Taiwan were realized early on, and if escalation dominance could be maintained. Phase one would be a destabilization campaign, as outlined, to try to reverse objectionable actions by Taipei. Should that fail, Beijing could escalate the conflict and implement a partial blockade of the island threatening escalation. If that also failed, China might choose to strike Taiwan using a multiphased attack scenario. SRBM attacks against key ROC infrastructure nodes and military facilities would be possible. The PLA Air Force could initiate an air battle. Finally, the next escalating step might be a combined airborne assault and a seaborne invasion by Chinese forces. In such a war much of Taiwan and coastal China would be badly damaged, and this author assumes the U.S. would come to Taiwan's defense.

Should China attack Taiwan, either as a jump-off from ongoing naval and air exercises, or in a sequenced, testing manner as previously outlined, a fundamental question for U.S. war fighters, assuming Washington came to Taiwan's defense, is whether U.S. contingency plans already exist, or whether they would have to be cobbled together in the midst of a developing crisis. If planning is in place, that would simplify Washington's pre-hostilities actions. If not, the U.S. response would have to be developed through "crisis action planning."

How well are the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Navy positioned and configured to challenge a Chinese attack on Taiwan? The Chinese attack scenarios outlined above are principally tactical in nature except for the SRBM attack. Likewise the general U.S. response, unless Washington decided to attack the PRC mainland, also would be tactical, involving actions initiated by U.S. Navy aircraft carriers and U.S. Air Force fighter units already in the Asia/Pacific theater.

The U.S. Navy usually has two aircraft carrier battle groups in the Western Pacific, but at any one time they can be spread between the Sea of Japan and Hawaii. The U.S. Air Force has conventional air units stationed in Hawaii, South Korea, Alaska, in mainland Japan and on Okinawa, but they would require extensive tanker support to operate in a Taiwan defensive action.

How might the U.S. respond to a Chinese military campaign against Taiwan? Using what Washington calls "flexible deterrent options," the Pacific Command might be ordered to place aircraft carriers near or into the Taiwan Strait, or seek to conduct joint maritime exercises with the Taiwan navy, or move additional F-15s and other assets to Okinawa or to the northern Philippines, assuming Tokyo and Manila granted permission.

A concurrent option might involve conducting freedom of navigation and air corridor exercises in the Strait area. These operations would be necessary to setting up a U.S. war fighting capability, whether or not they successfully deterred the Chinese from further action.

More seriously, if Taiwanese forces could not hold out, could the U.S. Navy get a blocking force onto the west side of Taiwan before PLAN and PLAAF assault forces had established a secure naval/air bridge across the Strait? And could U.S. Air Force fighter jets based in the region interdict Chinese air and support operations before PLA Air Force sorties had seriously worn down the ROC Air Force? The answer to both these questions, today in late 2002, is probably yes. But what about in 2005 and after?

Finally if, in assisting Taiwan, U.S. leaders in Washington might conclude that the United States forces would have to strike a limited number of mainland Chinese facilities supporting the PRC assault, i.e., ports, airfields, command bunkers, radar and satellite facilities, etc. Undoubtedly the PRC would defend those assets and might widen the conflict by attacking other U.S. assets. Given the existence of nuclear weapons on both sides, the dangers in escalation are obvious.

Presuming the conflict remained localized to the Taiwan Strait area, the mission of the USAF Global Strike Task Force (GSTF) likely would be to limit the numbers and effectiveness of PLAN and PLAAF forces engaged against Taiwan while trying to hold China's SRBM launch sites hostage, pending a reduction of hostilities. GSTF actions would reduce the flow of PLAAF and PLAN assets going against Taiwan giving ROC and U.S. defending forces time to blunt and destroy the front edge of the attacking Chinese forces. Of course, the U.S. Pacific Command and Taiwan's armed forces would have to establish secure war fighting links for synchronization of actions and deconfliction of assets, electronic identification of friends and foes, and jamming and disruption of PRC communications, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets supporting the attack.

All this is clearly hypothetical. This author believes that Beijing's leaders, like Washington's, want to avoid this kind of tragedy. Nevertheless, deterring a Chinese attack on Taiwan is the responsibility of all parties involved in the Strait problem and, so far, deterrence has worked. But the situation is not static, and it requires continued attention and serious planning by Washington and Taipei as long as the People's Republic of China continues to threaten the Republic of China.

#### *14 . . . Chinese Military Scenarios Against Taiwan*

## Notes

1. Refusing to renounce the use of force against Taiwan, China has posited these principal triggers for a decision to attack the island nation: a Taiwan declaration of independence, foreign intervention in Taiwan's affairs, acquisition of nuclear weapons, an internal unrest on Taiwan. Nevertheless, Beijing's February 2000 "White Paper" added another reason (probably on Jiang Zemin's insistence): failure by Taiwan to come into unification discussions with Beijing in a "reasonable" time. See Ministry of Defense, "China's National Defense, 2000," Beijing. February 2000. Also see the U.S. Department of Defense "Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China." Report to Congress Pursuant to the FY2000 National Defense Authorization Act, Washington DC, 12 July 2002, 46.

2. See, for example, *China Post*, staff, "Beijing mulling 'one China, four zones' concept: Official," [www.chinapost.com.tw](http://www.chinapost.com.tw), 13 August 2001. Taipei, however, insists on its own interpretation of "one China." See President Chen Shui-bian's remarks on 10 December 2001, as reported in *The China Post*, 10 December 2001, [www.chinapost.com.tw/p](http://www.chinapost.com.tw/p). In October 2002, Beijing shifted to a more threatening tone toward Taiwan. See Premier Zhu Rongji's remarks at the 53rd founding of the PRC, as reported in Susan V. Lawrence, "China Party's Path Is Unclear-As Communist Elite Gather to Mark National Day, Leadership Issues Loom," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 1 October 2002, A3.

3. Or as China's Vice President, Hu Jintao, put it in comments in Washington on 1 May 2002, "a retrogression may occur in Sino-US relations." David Sands and Bill Sammon, "Hu takes hard line on Taiwan," *The Washington Times*, 2 May 2002, 1.

4. The figure may have been as high as \$14 billion resulting from the PRC's July 1995 missile firings north of Taiwan. Private estimate by a European economist as cited in Edward Timperlake and William C. Triplett, II, *Red Dragon Rising, Communist China's Military Threat to America* (Washington, DC: Regnery Pub., Inc., 1999), 154.

5. Author's discussions with businessmen in Hong Kong, March 2002. The issue has sparked a vigorous debate in Taiwan. See, for example, Lin Miao-Jung, "Cabinet is censured on China investment rush," *Taipei Times*, 19 September 2002. [www.taipeitimes.com/news/2002/09/19/print\\_0000168612](http://www.taipeitimes.com/news/2002/09/19/print_0000168612). And as a Chinese official interviewed in early 2002 stated: "Our economy is our best weapon. We won't attack them. We will buy them. It's very Chinese." See John Pomphret, "China Sees Interest Tied to U.S.," *Washington Post*, 2 February 2002, A-18.

6. DoD Report as cited in "U.S. Defense Policy Toward Taiwan: Indefensible," Senate Staff, 8 March 2001.

7. IISS, *Military Balance 2000-2001* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2000), 196-197, 183, and *Military Balance 2001-2002*, 190. Also see DoD,

“Annual Report on the Military Power of the People’s Republic of China,” 12 July 2002, 16-18.

8. Conversations with ROCAF officers, Taipei, September 1999. Clearly, however, command and control constraints and constricted airspace would limit the number of fighters the PLAAF could effectively employ in a Strait air battle.

9. IISS, *Military Balance 2001-2002*, 189, 209. Two of Taiwan’s four submarines are WWII vintage training craft.

10. See Chen Shui-bian, “Declaring the Concept of ‘Decisive Campaign Beyond Boundry,’” *Taiwan Defense Affairs Quarterly*, 2000, as cited and interpreted in Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, “Homeland Defense with Taiwanese Characteristics,” in Andrew Scobell, Ed., *The Costs of Conflict: The Impact on China of a Future War* (Carlisle PA: Strategic Studies Institute, October 2001), 145-147. Also see Michael D. Swaine with Loren H. Runyon, *Ballistic Missiles and Missile Defense in Asia*, NBR Analysis, June 2002 (Seattle WA: NBR 2002), 52-53.

11. Chen Shui-bian, “Taiwan Stands Up,” inauguration remarks, 20 May 2000, Taipei.

12. See “Victory unlikely to worsen relations,” in the *China Daily* as cited in “Chinese media sees little change in cross-strait ties,” *The Straits Times*, 4 December 2001. President Chen has repeatedly challenged Beijing to respond to Taiwanese goodwill. Nevertheless, Taipei also has had to remind Beijing it will not be “bullied, dwarfed, or marginalized.” See Lin Chieh-yu, “Chen raises pitch of anti-China rhetoric.” *Taipei Times*, 4 August 2002, as in [www.taipetimes.com/news/2002/08/04](http://www.taipetimes.com/news/2002/08/04)

13. Richard L. Russell, “What if...China attacks Taiwan!” *Parameters*, Fall 2001, 76-91. The Pentagon has noted that PLA doctrine “includes the option of preemptive military action.” Also see “Report to Congress Pursuant to Section 1226 of the FY98 National Defense Authorization Act” as cited in Edward Timperlake and William C. Triplett II, *Red Dragon Rising* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc.1999) 160. The premise among some analysts in the U.S. about the likelihood of a surprise Chinese attack may be growing. As the most recent Pentagon report states: “Chinese doctrine is moving toward the goal of surprise, deception and shock effect...[against] Taipei.” See DoD “Annual Report on the Military Power of the People’s Republic of China,” 12 July 2002, 2.

14. See, for example, Damon Bristow, “Cyber-warfare rages across Taiwan Strait,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, February 2000, 40-46. Taipei claims hundreds of computer network attacks by China. The ROC admits to counterattacking PRC computer networks. Recent cross-strait charges of cyber hacker attacks are reported in, BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific-Political, “Taiwan military has never interfered with mainland TV signals, official says,” London, 1 October 2002, 1.



15. More details are found in Timperlake & Triplett, *Red Dragon Rising*, 159-165.

16. See U.S.-China Security Review Commission, Report to Congress, *The National Security Implications of the Economic Relationship between the United States and China*, (Washington DC: U.S.-China Security Review Commission, 15 July 2002), 162.

17. In May 2002 the PLA began large military maneuvers, possibly to continue for months, along the Chinese coast opposite Taiwan. Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough, "Inside the Ring: Mock Invasion," *Washington Times*, 31 May 2002, 9.

18. Commander Frank Boric, USN, "Sub Tzu and the Art of Submarine Warfare," *Naval Institute Proceedings*, November 1995, 66-67. Also see the concepts of Liu Huaqing, commander of the PLAN from 1982 to 1987, about surprise guerilla-like attacks at sea. As interpreted in Bernard C. Cole, "China's Maritime Strategy," in Colonel Susan M. Puska, ed., *People's Liberation Army After Next* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institution, August 2000), 293.

19. On 24 June 2002, the *Washington Post* reported that China was in negotiations with Russia for eight more Kilo-class submarines, two more Sovremenny-class destroyers as well as 40 Su-30 fighter-bombers. See John Pomfret, "China to Buy 8 More Russian Submarines," *Washington Post*, 25 June 2002, 15. Also see June Teufel Dreyer, "Taiwan's Military: A View from Afar," in Larry M. Wortzel, ed., *The Chinese Armed Forces in the 21st Century* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: SSI, December 1999), 294-296, and IISS, *Military Balance 2001-2002*, 189.

20. Timperlake and Triplett, *Red Dragon Rising*, 167. Also see the IISS view of these destroyers use for combating U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups, IISS, *Military Balance 2001-2002*, 172.

21. Cole, "China's Maritime Strategy," in Puska, 303.

22. Taking on the U.S. Navy in a Taiwan Strait fight is something Chinese analysts have to be assessing; I assume they are evaluating vulnerabilities in U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups, whose characteristics include their prominent signature, reliance on complex logistics, limited ASW and anti-mine capabilities. Also see Jeffrey Record, "Thinking about China and War," *Aerospace Power Journal*, Winter 2001, 76.

23. IISS, *Military Balance 2001-2002*, p 173. Also see CNA, Kaohsiung, "China Shipbuilding says it can build submarines if given the specifications," *Taipei Times*, 7 June 2002, 1, and Jason Dean, "U.S. Conference Masks Shift," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 11 March, 2002, A-3.

24. See Brian Hsu, "Taiwan navy not ready for AEGIS," 22 March 2001, [www.taipeitimes.com/news/2001/03/22story/0000078556](http://www.taipeitimes.com/news/2001/03/22story/0000078556).

25. See U.S. DoD, "Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China," 12 July 2002, 3.

26. Out of a total of 35000 listed by IISS, all under PLAAF command. See IISS, *Military Balance 2001-2002*, 188.

27. U.S. DoD report as cited in *Red Dragon Rising*, 157.

28. Cole, "China's Maritime Strategy," in Puska, 300-301.

29. David Shambaugh, "A Matter of Time: Taiwan's Eroding Military Advantage," *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2000, 122-123.

30. Cole, "China's Maritime Strategy," in Puska, 313. Also see Cole's comments in the *Washington Post*, 25 June 2002, 15.

31. June Teufel Dreyer to author, May 2002. Also see U.S.-China Security Review Commission, Report to Congress, 15 July 2002, 161.

32. Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough, "Inside the Ring: Chinese Missile Test," *Washington Times*, 22 March 2002, 9. Also see staff reporter, "U.S. accuses Beijing of strait missile build-up," Hong Kong iMail, 29 August 2001, citing a *Washington Times* report. <http://hk-icemail.singtao.com>, 29 August 2001. Also see IISS, *Military Balance 2001-2002*, 188. Also see DoD "Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China," 12 July 2002, 2, 16, 51. Details on PLA SRMBs opposite Taiwan are found in Michael D. Swaine with Loren H. Runyon, *Ballistic Missiles and Missile Defense in Asia*, NBR Analysis, June 2002 (Seattle WA, NBR 2002), 15-16.

33. Michael Klare, "The Next Great Arms Race," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, 149-150. Also see Gerald Segal, "Taiwan's Nuclear Card," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, 4 August 1998, and David Albright and Corey Gay, "Taiwan: Nuclear Nightmare Avoided," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Jan/Feb 1998, 54-60.

34. As of 1998 China had approximately 300 strategic and 150 tactical nuclear warheads. See Rodney Jones and Mark G. McDonough, *Tracking Nuclear Proliferation: A Guide in Maps and Charts, 1998* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Corporation, 1999), 54-55.

35. See Barry M. Schneider, *Future War and Counterproliferation* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 5-17. Also see Sidney D. Drell et. al., (eds.) *The New Terror: Fighting the Threat of Biological and Chemical Weapons* (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1999), 30-31.

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